

# Yes, I'm Trying to Convert You: A Reasonable Defense

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[ 0 : 00 ] We want to be shaped by it, we want to be faithful servants, effective witnesses of our Lord Jesus.

So to that end, we ask that you would address us, teach us, and by the power of Holy Spirit, change us this morning. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Acts chapter 25, starting verse 13. I'm going to be, it's a long passage, I'm going to jump around a little bit, so I invite you to your Bible's open. Acts 25, verse 13.

Now when some days had passed, the Rippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, There is a man left prisoner by Felix, and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him.

I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him.

[ 1 : 27 ] So when they came together here, I made no other way, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evil as I supposed.

Rather, they had certain points to dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be a Bible. Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding him. But when Paul had a deal to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar. Then Agrippa said to Festus, I would like to hear the man myself.

Tomorrow, said he, you will hear him. So on the next day, Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent man of the city.

Then at the command of Festus, Paul was brought up. And Festus said, King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer.

[ 2 : 42 ] But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. But I had nothing definite to write to my lord about him.

Therefore, I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after we have examined him, I may have something to write. For it seems to be unreasonable in sending a prisoner not to educate the charges.

So the greatest party of religion, I've lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain as they earnestly worship night and day.

And for this hope, I am accused by Jews, O King. Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.

[ 3 : 46 ] And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme. And in raging fury against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. In this connection, I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests.

At midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

It is hard for you to kick against the goats. And I said, who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

For this reason, the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day, I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying, both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass, that the Christ must suffer, and that by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light, both to our people and to the Gentiles.

[ 5 : 41 ] And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, you are out of your mind. Your great learning is driving you out of your mind. But Paul said, I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.

For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly, for I am persuaded that none of these things had escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?

I know that you believe. And Agrippa said to Paul, In a short time, would you persuade me to be a Christian? And Paul said, Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.

Then the king rose, and the governor, and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, and when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.

And Agrippa said to Festus, This man could have been set free, if he had not appealed to Caesar. This is God's holy and authoritative word. In the book, *The Insanity of God*, which is one of the books that are on our 2022 Trinity Reads Book Challenge, Nick Ripken tells many of the stories that he has collected over the 20 years of visiting and interviewing hundreds of believers who live in areas where there is intense persecution of Christians.

[ 7 : 19 ] And at the end of the book, Ripken makes the startling observation that our persecuted believers around the world do not ask us to pray that their persecution would cease.

Instead, they ask us to pray that, quote, they would be faithful and obedient through their persecution and suffering. Because Jesus taught that persecution will be the norm and not the exception for Christians.

And because 2 Timothy 3.12 teaches that indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Our brothers and sisters in persecuted countries believe that praying for the end of persecution is tantamount to praying that people will no longer follow Christ.

Ripken notes that even in countries where it is most intense and pervasive, quote, persecution is completely avoidable. If someone simply leaves Jesus alone, doesn't seek him or follow him, then persecution will simply not happen.

Beyond that, even if someone becomes a follower of Jesus, persecution will likely not happen if the faith is kept private and personal. If a person is silent about their faith in Jesus, the chance of being persecuted is very small.

[ 8 : 40 ] So if our goal is reducing persecution, that task is easily achieved. First, just leave Jesus alone. Second, if you do happen to find him, just keep him to yourself.

The reason for persecution, then, is that people keep finding Jesus and then they refuse to keep him to themselves. Having said this, Ripken asks a provocative question.

He says, perhaps the question should not be, why are others persecuted? Perhaps the better question is, why are we not?

Could it be that we are not persecuted because our lives are indistinguishable from that of unbelieving people in the world?

Could it be that we are not persecuted because we have been silent about Jesus? When our brothers and sisters in persecuted parts of the world have shared Jesus at the risk of being beaten, ostracized, jailed, and even killed, have we kept Jesus to ourselves from the comfort of our free western world?

[ 9 : 54 ] In this passage, we see the apostle Paul on trial yet again. And once again, we see Paul bear faithful witness to Jesus. Even in dire circumstances, whenever he opens his mouth, it seems Paul can't help himself but to speak of Jesus.

And through Paul's example, Luke reminds us that we too are servants and witnesses of the risen Lord Jesus. And we've been sent out to open people's eyes so that they might turn to the light of Christ.

That's the main point that Luke is making here. So let's talk first about how Jesus is the resurrected Lord and then secondly about how we are his servants and witnesses in this passage. So this is taking place sometime between 58 and 60 AD.

It's when Porcius Festus who replaced Antonius Felix as the Roman procurator of Judea. And Paul is under trial again. This time, he is being interrogated by King Agrippa.

Chapter 25, verse 13 tells us that Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. The Agrippa mentioned here in this passage is Agrippa the second.

[ 11 : 05 ] He is the great grandson of Herod the first who tried to kill Jesus when he was an infant. And the son of Herod Agrippa the first who appears several times throughout the book of Acts as a violent persecutor of the church.

So he's got quite the heritage here, this Agrippa. And Bernice that is mentioned here is Agrippa the second's sister. And also she happened to be the older sister of Drusilla who we know is the wife of Festus, Festus' predecessor Felix that was mentioned in chapter 24.

Agrippa the second is a client king appointed by the Roman emperor to rule over the Jewish world, over Jerusalem and Judea and surrounding regions. Because of this, Agrippa was an expert in Jewish affairs.

He was intimately familiar with the controversies of the Jews, the theology of the Jews, their politics, etc. So he likely would have been aware already of the waves that Paul was causing among the Jews.

And that's why later in chapter 26 verses 2-3 Paul says this to Agrippa. He says, I consider myself fortunate that it is before you King Agrippa I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews.

[ 12 : 20 ] Especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. So this is a great opportunity for Paul to be vindicated. And given this background, Agrippa's interest in Paul makes sense.

And so when Festus mentions that he is holding Paul in prison, he says immediately in 25 verse 22, I would like to hear the man myself. And Festus grants him the wish.

But before Festus gives the floor to Agrippa, he gives a summary of the situation of his assessment of Paul twice. First informally in chapter 25 verses 14-21 and then again formally during the official proceedings in verses 24-27.

And in both of those times, Festus mentions Paul's innocence. He says in verses 18-19, when the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed.

Rather, they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus who was dead but whom Paul asserted to be alive. So the Jews were, as we've been following in this story, were falsely accusing Paul of desecrating the temple and of starting a riot and they were trying to get a capital sentence for him.

[ 13 : 34 ] But Paul was not guilty of any of those crimes. He was innocent and he was only claiming that Jesus is the promised Messiah and that he died and was raised from the dead and that all must put their faith in him.

And so again, in verses 24-25, Festus summarizes, the whole Jewish people were shouting that Paul ought not to live any longer but I found that he had done nothing deserving death.

Paul's not guilty of any crime and that's how believers should be when they bear witness in a hostile world. We should be innocent and yet we must bear bold witness to Jesus. So what then was the reason why Jews wanted to kill Paul so badly?

Festus' assessment was that it had to do with the question of the resurrection, Jesus' resurrection. And his conclusion is consistent with what Paul's been saying all along because he's been saying from chapter 23 onward every time that it's because of his claim that Jesus was raised from the dead that he is now being persecuted.

It's with respect to the resurrection of the dead that he was on trial. And that's the point that Paul emphasizes again before Agrippa. Look at chapter 26 verses 68 with me.

[14:51] It says, Paul says, And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers to which our 12 tribes hope to attain as they earnestly worship night and day.

And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O King. Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? A consequence of the fall of humanity because of Adam's sin was loss of access to the tree of life as we know from Genesis 3.

God had placed the tree of life in the Garden of Eden for people to eat it and to dwell forever in his presence. But because of Adam's sin death came into the picture as a penalty for sin.

And in all the genealogies of the Old Testament in Genesis, Numbers, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, we find the haunting refrain, So and so lived this many years and he died.

And that raises a huge theological question. God, can you do anything about death? You promised Abraham that his descendants will be as innumerable as the stars in the sky, but who cares?

[16:10] He's dead. You used Moses to rescue the Israelites out of Egypt, but he died before he could even enter the promised land.

You promised David that one of his descendants will reign on his throne forever, but what gives? He'll never see it. He's dead.

Yes, Lord, you have done much for your people. You rescued them out of their slavery in Egypt. You brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey. You gave them a nation and a kingdom, but what about death?

People are still falling like flies left and right. Can you do something about that? Can you undo that? Some of us have lost loved ones recently, and we continue to remember with sadness, and we wonder, why death?

death? Yes, Christians have been used by God in ancient times and modern times to raise the dead, as prophets Elijah and Elisha have done, as apostles Peter and Paul have done, as Jesus himself did, but all of those people, even those who were temporarily reanimated, eventually died again.

[17:33] Again, death is the most significant consequence of the fall, but can death itself be defeated? The prophets of the Old Testament picked up on this theme and relate to us what God promised to do about death.

In Isaiah 25, 8, it says, He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of His people He will take away from the earth.

Isaiah 26, 19, Your dead shall live, their body shall rise. You will, to you who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy. In Ezekiel 37, after God raises, miraculously, a valley of dry bones and brings them back to life, He promises this, Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people.

I will bring you into the land of Israel, and you shall know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. In Daniel 12, verse 2, perhaps one of the most famous examples, it says, Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

And this is Paul's point. When numerous passages of Scripture point to this promise of the resurrection, that God is going to deal with this problem of death once and for all, why should anyone who believes in the Word of God find it unbelievable that God raises the dead?

[19:15] Paul's faith in the resurrected Jesus was rooted in the Jewish Scriptures. Contrary to being someone who is anti-Jewish, Paul is arguing that, no, I am being a faithful Jew.

This is what I've been taught in the Jewish Scriptures. Jesus is the fulfillment of the hope of the 12 tribes of Israel. And it's precisely for proclaiming this Messiah that we had all been waiting for that you are not persecuting me.

So Paul continues in verses 22 to 23, To this day, I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass, that the Christ must suffer, and that by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.

Hosea chapter 6, verse 2, prophesied specifically that the Messiah would die and be raised on the third day. And he prophesied that our resurrection would be connected to be wrapped up with Jesus' resurrection, the Messiah's resurrection.

And that's what Paul's saying when he says here that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead. That implies that Jesus is not the last to rise from the dead.

[ 20 : 41 ] There will be others who follow in his footsteps. This is the idea that Jesus is the first fruits from the dead, which Paul, that's an idea that Paul expands upon in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 19 to 26.

I think I have that to project for you. He says, If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order.

Christ, the first fruits, then that is coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom to God, the Father, after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. The idea of the first fruits in the Old Testament has to do with bringing the first of your produce, the first fruits of your produce that you farmed as well as the first fruits of your livestock as an offering to God in thanksgiving.

[ 21 : 54 ] And that offering, the first fruits, represented the rest of the harvest. It was a way of acknowledging that really all that we have is from God.

It's a good gift from him. And really all of it belongs to him. But we bring the first fruits, the best and the first things that we have bought, we have brought from our produce as a way to honor God and recognize that it's all from him and that it all belongs to him.

And it's a pledge of the harvest that is to come. We're saying when we give our first fruits to God, there will be a harvest to follow. This is just the first fruits that God's given to us.

And in a similar way, Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection. He's the first fruit, first to be raised from the dead. And it's the resurrection of Christ that guarantees his followers future resurrection. It's a pledge for us. just as when Adam died, when Adam sinned and he died, he was the first man, he was the representative of all of humanity. And when he died, he brought death into all of humanity.

[ 22 : 57 ] And similarly, when Jesus, the new Adam, the representative of all those who pledged their allegiance to Jesus, to him, when Jesus is raised from the dead, that's the guarantee that all those who belong to him will also be raised from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15, 56 says, the sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. It's because Jesus paid the penalty for sin that we can be free.

Because if sin is not dealt with, death can never be avoided. Because wherever there is sin, there is death because death is the punishment for sin. And but by dying on the cross for our sins, taking up our penalty on the cross, Jesus dealt with sin once and for all so that those who believe in him would no longer be under the power of death.

Jesus has paid our debt. That's what Paul is proclaiming. But in order to be guaranteed this resurrection, we have to align ourselves with Jesus. Paul says that in 26, verse 18 of our book, in the book of Acts, that we gain a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus.

By believing that Jesus is the Son of God. By believing that Jesus is the Messianic King, the Savior of the world, and that he died for our sins and was raised from the dead to give us eternal resurrection life.

[ 24 : 26 ] But this faith is not a mental assent only. It's a belief that affects our behavior. That's why in verses 18 and 20, Paul uses the language of turning and repentance.

Paul says in verse 20 that he preached that people should repent and turn to God performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. To repent means to turn.

If you really believe in Jesus, there will be deeds that are in keeping with our repentance. Imagine that your friend is driving and you're sitting on the passenger side.

You have the GPS in your hand. he is going in the wrong direction. So you tell him, hey, you have to make a U-turn. You have to turn around. And he keeps driving in the wrong direction.

So you tell him, hey, you made the wrong turn. You have to turn around. And he keeps driving in the wrong direction. And at that point, you would wonder, did my friend hear me?

[ 25 : 30 ] Is he ignoring me? Does he think, I don't know how to listen to read the GPS, not giving him the right direction? Because, if he really heard him, he would have turned around.

In a similar way, when we believe in Jesus, you turn toward him. You reorient your life around him. Your purposes and priorities are realigned with Jesus' purposes and priorities.

And so, if you say you believe in Jesus, but your life gives no evidence that you have, in fact, turned around, it brings into question whether you really repented, whether you really believed.

And if you are here this morning and you have not turned around, if you're still going in the wrong direction, then you must repent and believe in Jesus. think of how much of your time, your life, how much of human activity in general is driven by the desire to prolong life and avoid death.

All the health precautions we take, diets, exercise, medicine, research, even work. We work ultimately, right, because we need to earn money so that we can buy food to eat because you can't live without working.

[ 26 : 57 ] But despite all these efforts, the world has no answer for death. The resurrected Jesus is the only person who has ever solved the problem of death and he is our only answer.

And this is why it's imperative that those who have found Jesus, those who are already servants of Jesus and must bear witness to him, tell everyone about his death and resurrection.

And that brings me to my second point, that we are his servants and witnesses. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news, this is the best news in all the world and we are responsible for spreading it.

Paul describes his mission of proclaiming the gospel in chapter 26, verse 18 as to open their eyes. Whose eyes? He says in verse 17 and 23, that is to open the eyes of both Jews and Gentiles.

This would have been surprising for the Jews because they didn't think their eyes need to be opened. Well, they are the chosen people of God after all, but this is what Paul proclaimed, that the Jews' eyes also need to be opened.

[ 28 : 08 ] This is a good lesson for us. It teaches us that sometimes even the people who are very religious and spiritual, who seem to think that they have all the answers, who have a religious upbringing and a spiritual heritage, maybe even our pastor's kids, are lost.

Sometimes I think we can be lulled into thinking that people who seem to be doing well for themselves in this world don't need Jesus. But that's not the case. Everyone is lost apart from Jesus.

Everyone is a sinner in need of a Savior. So Paul says he was sent out by Jesus, quote, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in him, in Jesus.

Everyone who doesn't know Jesus is groping about in the dark. Do you really believe that, brothers and sisters? Even the most intelligent person you meet, even the most successful person you meet, even the person that appears to have everything figured out is hopelessly lost without Jesus.

Do you believe that? Everyone who doesn't know Jesus is under the power of Satan. Even the most moral and law-abiding person, even the most prolific good doer that everyone seems to admire, is ultimately under the power of Satan.

[ 29 : 48 ] Do you really believe that? And this is why we as servants and witnesses of the risen Lord Jesus, we must open their eyes to the light of Christ.

The fact that some people don't want to hear the gospel does not make the gospel any less of good news. The fact that some people don't believe the gospel does not make it any less of a good news. It is the good news. It is the only good news of salvation. It is what we have been commissioned to share. And that command, it is a command.

It comes to us from the highest possible authority. In chapter 25, verse 26, Festus refers to Caesar as his Lord.

But Paul serves a different Lord. He addresses the risen Jesus as Lord in chapter 26, verse 15. He says, while he was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests to persecute Christians, he says in verse 12 to 18, at midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun that shone around me and those who journeyed with me.

[ 31 : 04 ] And when we had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goals. And I said, who are you, Lord?

And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you.

This is a scene out of the throne room. Because when you go into the throne room of a king, you fall prostrate before them.

And so they all fall to the ground when the light shines that is brighter than the sun. And when you are prostrate before the king, only when the king says you can rise up, you rise up. And that's what Paul does.

Jesus says to him, rise and stand upon your feet, for I have chosen you, appointed you as a servant and a witness. Why did Paul do a complete 180 in his life?

[ 32 : 07 ] Moments before he was doing the bidding and then going with the authority of the high priests to persecute believers. Why did he turn around? Why is he now proclaiming the Christ that he was persecuting once in his life?

Because he encountered the risen Lord who has a higher authority. authority. The authority of the risen Lord overrode the authority of the chief priests.

In the various spheres of our lives, we listen to people who have authority in those respective spheres, don't we? If you're in the classroom, you listen to the teacher. If we're in at work, we listen to our boss.

If you're a child at home, you listen to your parent. But here is Jesus who has risen from the dead. Here is Jesus who has ascended to the heavens.

Here is Jesus who is seated at the right hand of God the Father himself, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named.

[ 33 : 13 ] Here is Jesus who speaks from a light from heaven brighter than the sun. Only thing that can possibly be is the unapproachable light that God himself dwells in that we read early in 1 Timothy 6 verse 15.

The risen Jesus is God. He is the son of God. He is the king of kings and lord of lords whose authority overrides every other authority.

And his authority extends to every sphere over the entire cosmos. So when Jesus tells us to do something, we obey.

And this is why Jesus said to Paul when he appeared to him in verse 14, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It's hard for you to kick against the goads. A goad is a pointed stick that farmers use to drive cattle, prod them in the direction that they wanted to go.

So if you want them to go this way, you press them this way. But if sometimes cattle will be rebellious and they'll kick against it, try going a different direction. But that's not a battle that the cattle can win.

[ 34 : 27 ] Because the more you turn and the more you, there's only so long can the cattle remain under the pressure of that sharp goad before it folds and starts to follow the farmer.

So that expression was used by the Greeks to refer to resisting something that has higher power, something that is irresistible, ultimately unavoidable. Paul could not avoid his commission, his call, because God had called him to it.

The Lord Jesus, who had all the authority, had commanded him to it. And so Paul says in verse 19, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. He obeyed.

He followed Jesus. He started proclaiming him everywhere. Most of us don't think twice about obeying human authorities. Right? When the traffic cop tells us to drive through a red light or stop at a green light, even though we are, that goes against everything we have been taught in driving school.

And it goes against the pattern that we have come to be accustomed to every single day. We do what they tell us to do because the cop's authority overrides that of the traffic light.

[ 35 : 45 ] So when the Lord Jesus commands us to go and tell people about his gospel, it doesn't matter how much peer pressure we face. It doesn't matter what the law of the land is.

We obey because it comes from a higher authority. This is why Paul was able to stand up tall and bear witness to Jesus even before kings.

Look at chapter 25, verse 23 with me. It's a great scene. It says, so on the next day, Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city.

Then at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. Notice the star contrast. Here's Agrippa and Bernice arrive with great pomp in their royal regalia, undoubtedly.

They're accompanied by military tribunes, probably in their uniforms and medals and everything that shows who they are. And then they're also surrounded by, Paul's also surrounded by the prominent men in all their pretenses of power and luxury.

[ 36 : 50 ] And then with utter simplicity, it says, Paul's brought in. Probably in his plain garb, prisoner garb. Imagine yourself in Paul's shoes, how easy it would have been for him to be overwhelmed and intimidated.

A raid before him is a spectacular display of earthly wealth, authority, and power. And here he is, a lone prisoner. But that's the thing.

Paul is not alone. He says in chapter 26, verse 22, Paul says, To this day, I have had the help that comes from God.

And so I stand here testifying both to small and great. Because Jesus, who has all authority in heaven and on earth, stands by him to help him.

Paul is able to stand up and testify both to small and great without shrinking. Sometimes as Christians, we're tempted to fight fire with fire.

[ 38 : 02 ] When the world's renowned scientists tell us that science makes God obsolete, we point to prominent scientists who believe in God. When the world's philosophers tell us that God is dead, we point to Christian philosophers who argue that God is very much alive.

Oh, you have doctorates? We have doctorates too. Oh, you have experts on your side? We have experts on our side too. But then when we're outnumbered, when we feel out-resourced, when we are outdone, when we are outlawed, we shrink.

We shrink. But we don't need to do that. Because Jesus, the risen Lord, has all the authority.

We can hold our heads up high and speak of Jesus in any situation. Not only when we have power. Paul was bold and unapologetic in his witness.

In chapter 26, verse 27, when Paul asks King Agrippa, Do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe. Agrippa responds, In a short time, would you persuade me to be a Christian?

[ 39 : 20 ] Agrippa is incredulous. He's having a hard time processing the fact that Paul is trying to convert him. Paul, you're on trial here.

You're a prisoner. And you only have a brief moment here to defend yourself. And are you spending that time trying to persuade me to become a Christian?

During that time. And Paul's response in verse 29 is amazing. He says, Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am.

Except for these chains. Is that your heart for your unbelieving neighbors and friends? That they would become like I am?

That they would love Christ like I do? They would know Christ like I do? Is that your real heart? How would you answer if one of your friends or coworkers or neighbors asked you point blank, Hey, are you trying to convert me to be a Christian?

[ 40 : 24 ] Well, no, not exactly. I'm not trying to get you to change. I'm not trying to proselytize.

I just want to share my perspective, my opinion. That's not Paul's response. Paul's answer is an emphatic yes.

Yes. I am trying to convert you. Yes. I am trying to convert you and not you only, but everyone who hears me. Because I want everyone to be saved.

Billions of people on Twitter, on Facebook, politicians, religious teachers, professors, they're all trying to persuade us to believe something that they believe is true, that they believe is good.

And it's nonsense that it's only religious faith that has to be relegated to the realm of private opinion. Even as a prisoner, even during his defense speech during trial, Paul is evangelizing.

[ 41 : 54 ] What about us? In the book I mentioned at the beginning, The Insanity of God, one of the believers who had endured much persecution in communist Russia when he was still USSR, says this to Nick Ripken.

Don't you ever give up in freedom what we would never give up in persecution. And that is our witness to the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Let us not be silent in times of peace when our brothers and sisters throughout history and throughout the world have spoken up in times of great persecution.

Let's pray. God, we pray that you would shape and define our reality.

That we would be, we would see and live with, by faith and not by sight.

[ 43 : 09 ] so that we can truly say of all those who, to all those who don't know you, to God, I wish that all of you would be saved.

That all of you would be like me who knows Jesus. to all of you would be saved. That we pray that you would make us a church that shares the gospel with unbelievers every week.

To small and great, to the poor and rich, to the weak and the powerful. and we trust, Lord, that when we do, that you will save.

Embolden us, empower us as your witnesses. In Jesus' name, Amen.